

THE POSTAL SERVICE

Wonderful Female Readers of
The Dead Letter Office.

THEY ARE BETTER THAN MEN

Their Salaries, and a Look at the Women who
Earn \$1,600 a Year—Romance
of the Department.

WASHINGTON, July 2, 1890.—[Special correspondence of THE HERALD.]—I spent a day this week among the ladies of the post office department. They are the brightest of Uncle Sam's daughters, and he has no more efficient clerks than these girls who handle the mails, decipher dead letters and do the thousand and one odd things which have to be done in the great machine known as

"THE POSTAL SERVICE." Postmaster-General Wadsworth appreciates the value of woman's work. He has his journals kept by a woman clerk, and this clerk is paid \$1,000 a year, which is the highest salary paid to a woman in the department. I have made a thorough inquiry as to the value of woman as clerks, and I find they are the equals of men. They are not so prone to loaf as their brothers, and as one of them said to me yesterday: "You will not find a single girl in these offices who makes it a practice of having two hats and leaving one on the peg when she slips out with the other and takes an excursion over the city. I know of men who do this every thing. Their chiefs see that their hats are there and they suppose they are busy at work in some other part of the building."

"I don't think the women shirk their work as much as the men," this girl went on. "They are not on sick leave any more than the men are, and their work will average fully as well. In some classes of their work in the department the women are superior to the men, and I don't believe there is a woman in the department that does not care for her work."

"What salaries do you get?" I asked. "There are, in round numbers, eighty ladies in the postoffice department," was the reply. "and they receive from \$1,600 a year. There are only about six who get \$230 a year, and the average salary must be at least \$1,000. Fifty-five of us get \$800 a year, fifteen receive \$100 a month, and there are fully a dozen who get \$1,000. These salaries are not large in comparison with those received by the men who, in some cases, do the same work, and in Washington they do not mean anything like riches."

"Do most of the women support themselves, and what is their average age?" "It is hardly fair to ask a woman her age," said the postoffice maiden; "but three-fourths of the women here are above thirty, and we have many gray-haired ladies among them. The gray-haired women, in many cases, make the most clerks, and though some of them could not pass the civil service examination, they know all about the work and can turn out more and better work than the new graduates, who are now coming in under the civil service laws. A great many of the new clerks are quite young, and we have many blooming maidens of eighteen and twenty who work side by side with gray-haired women of fifty and sixty. The most of the lady clerks have families depending upon them, and not a few of them are widows. Many of them have had fathers or husbands noted in the history of the country, and the average social standing of all is high."

The main work of

is done by women, and the variety of its work is but little known to the people. The lady I talked with in the above paragraph is a dead letter office clerk, and like the other ladies I met in the department, she is as quick as lightning and as bright as a star. One of the department rules relating to dead letters requires a knowledge of foreign languages. All unclaimed foreign letters are sent to this bureau, and these ladies have to read the addresses on the envelopes whether in French, German, Italian, Russian, Swedish or Dutch. There are fifteen different countries belonging to the postal union, and thousands of misdirected letters are sent to this bureau every week. The skill shown by these clerks is wonderful, and they find the right address of letters which are more difficult to read than the Chinese puzzle. A complete record is kept of every letter received, and any unclaimed foreign letter which comes to the department can be traced back to the country from which it was sent. The clerk I met in the department is a woman of about thirty years of age, and she is a native of the United States. She is a widow, and she has a family of four children. She is a very kind and pleasant woman, and she is very intelligent. She is a very good worker, and she is very efficient. She is a very good example of the women who work in the postal service.

More than thirty thousand photographs go astray every year, and fully 15,000 letters never get the pictures which their sweet hearts would like to see. For these reasons, when possible, but they are never destroyed, and there is an odd million or so living dead men boxed up in the cases of the postoffice. It is a very sad thing to see the pictures of the dead men in the rooms of the basement. Another department is devoted entirely to the returning of stamps, and more than 100,000 letters are received every year at the dead letter office containing postage stamps. If these stamps amount to more than 2 cents they are returned to the owner, and if the owner can not be found, they are never used again. If there is no index to the stamps, they are pasted on sheets, fifty stamps to the sheet, and with a brush of red ink one of these fair lady clerks spoils the faces of Washington, Jefferson or Jackson, as the case may be, and when a large number of these sheets have accumulated they are taken down to the basement furnace and committed to the flames.

An immense amount of

goes through the mails, and some of the letters that come to the dead letter office are the vilest of the vile. Many of them contain bad pictures, and some are filled with writing which no pure woman ought to read. For this reason, women are not permitted to open the dead letters, and this work is all done by men. With long, sharp knives they rapidly go through the letters cutting them open and passing them to the lady clerks. They are then divided into departments, for each lady has her peculiar cities and localities after which she looks. For instance, all Alabama letters are sent to one woman, and another girl has the looking over of letters of a certain number of cities in the great northwest. Another will pass upon letters from the Pacific slope, and others have eastern cities, so that often the number of a street gives the city and state to which the letter should have addressed but the names of which have been omitted. The knowledge of the country possessed by the clerks surpasses understanding, and like the wonderful lady clerks of the treasury, they seem to know by intuition just where a letter ought to go and by a sort of mind-reading to be able to carry out the wishes of the sender. I cannot describe the hen track scrawls of the writing they have to decipher. This is wonderful enough, but the translation of the misspelled and misdirected words is even more wonderful. Here is one addressed to Thomas A. Brooks, Big Trees, Montana Territory. But there is no such place as Big Trees in Montana, and the letter was sent to Big Timber, Montana, and it reached the right person. Here is a letter to Hatch, Alabama. It is sent to Hatch, Alabama, and is correctly mailed. Another letter I looked at was for Lizzie P. Gerard, Lancaster, Penn. It came to the dead letter office instead of going direct to Lizzie, because Lizzie's correspondent was, evi-

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Recently, a college sophomore who wanted to

show that he had learned his Greek alphabet, and he addressed his ladylove in

Greek.

Some letters are sent with the evident

intention of

and one was received last week so written

that it looked like a perfect scrawl. The

bright lady who handled it whipped a look-

ing glass out of her pocket and in this it

read as plain as corporate. The letters

in the postoffice department are contin-

ually coming the dead letter office. Here is

one to Sam Lee, Lampertville N. T. It was

sent to Lambertville, New York, and it

reached the right Mongolian.

Among other letters I looked at was one

that the mice had eaten out of the heart of

the direction. Still, from the few letters

that were left the ladies here sent it to the

right party at Jersey City and its delivery

has been duly acknowledged.

These dead letters increase every year,

and at present about six millions of letters

and packages are received every year.

Here in the postoffice department, letters are

sent off every year without postage stamps

on them, and nearly half a million people

address their letters and leave off the city,

and about twenty thousand letters are sent

to go. About twenty thousand letters, or

nearly two thousand letters every month,

are put into the postoffice of the United

States without any address whatever on

them, and more than four million letters

are unclaimed. You would think that a

person sending money in a letter would be

very careful about addressing it. But this

does not seem to be the case. For last year

\$23,000 in cash was found in dead letters

and returned to the owners, and nearly one

million and a half of dollars in notes,

checks and money orders were misdirected

and were returned by these ladies. In ad-

dition to this there were over twelve thou-

sand dollars' worth of money and merchan-

dise that could not be returned, and hun-

dreds of thousands of dollars are lost every

year in the mails through the carelessness

of those who send through them.

It was in the postoffice department that

the rule of

was first permitted. Under the old spoils

system it was not thought right that a

family should have more than one repre-

sentative in the government departments at

Washington, and in case a young lady fell

in love with a man who was a clerk in the

department, while Mr. Villard was

postmaster-general a young lady clerk came

to him and said she wanted to get mar-

ried to a fellow clerk, but she did not

want to leave her place, and far more im-

portant, she said she wanted to get mar-

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estate of Henry Malbon, deceased, de-

ceased June 1, 1889, the undersigned ad-

ministratrix will sell at private sale to the highest

bidder for cash, on Friday, July 19, 1890, at 12

o'clock noon, at law office of Ballard, Smith &

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block three (3), plat 1, Salt Lake City survey,

thence north 10 degrees 10 minutes (10° 10')

west, thence north ten (10) rods, thence south